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THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST
PROVED FROM HIS OWN DECLARATIONS ATTESTED AND INTERPRETED BY
HIS LIVING WITNESSES, THE JEWS.

A S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
AT ST. PETER'S FEBRUARY XXVIII. MDCCXC.

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AT the request of some much respected friends of the Author, the following Sermon is presented to the public. He has undertaken in it to prove, what indeed has often been proved before; and to support from the Scriptures the belief of what there is the best evidence for asserting has always been believed in all ages of the Church, and the best grounds for thinking will continue to be believed, by infinitely the greater part of those, who study the Scriptures seriously and without prejudice; whatever unbelievers may think, or may wish others to think, of the progress of their opinions.—Yet any attempt to prove the divinity of Christ may not be thought unseasonable at a time, when unbelievers charge the Church of England with Idolatry for her admission of this doctrine, accuse her Ministers, of insincerity for conforming to it contrary to their conviction, and consider such “Corruptions of Christianity” as justifiable reasons for their utmost endeavours to demolish the system, which supports them.

It is in vain perhaps to promise novelty of proof on a subject so often discussed by believers and unbelievers: yet I am not aware, that the argument for Christ's divinity, as stated in the following discourse, and resting on “Christ's own declarations attested “and interpreted by his living witnesses the Jews,” has ever been urged as the great fundamental proof of the divinity of Christ.

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Christ. But whether it be new or old, it seems to have the following advantages. Christ's own declarations of his divinity afford to common understandings more plain and tangible evidence than that of Prophecy; and more complete than the evidence of Miracles: and when attested by his enemies as well as disciples, who heard them, and by the events, which followed from them, they appear to be susceptible of but one meaning, and consequently to be free from the ambiguities, which are sometimes imputed to Scripture language.

The object therefore of the discourse is to recall the attention of the reader to the first period of historical evidence on the subject, viz. Christ's own declarations attested and interpreted by his living witnesses, the Jews:—to point out the principal causes, which have contributed to produce the difference of opinions concerning the person of Christ:—and the consequences of one of those causes as they affect the Christian faith and the national Church:—and lastly to urge the study of the Scriptures, and of the great principles of Christian faith derived from them, and professed by the Church of England, as the best means of securing the purity of the Christian faith, and affection to the national establishment.

To the Sermon are added some Notes for the purpose of pursuing rather more in detail, than the Discourse itself would admit, some of the leading circumstances of our Saviour's testimony of himself; and to illustrate some reflections.

JOHN III. 12.

IF I HAVE TOLD YOU OF EARTHLY THINGS, AND YE BELIEVE NOT, HOW SHALL YE BELIEVE, IF I TELL YOU OF HEAVENLY THINGS?

THE Religion of Christ is distinguished from all others by the purity of its precepts, and the mysteries of its creed: by precepts, which divine benevolence alone could have suggested, by mysteries, which divine revelation only could have made known; by precepts, which, in the comparison, surpass the most perfect systems of human wisdom, and mysteries, which admit of no comparison.

THE precepts of Christianity are calculated not only to direct the course of our actions, but to regulate the first movements of the mind. They condemn not only the commission of sin, but the wilful indulgence of every irregular thought. In the duties of benevolence, its precepts enlarge the limits of local and national affection, and extend it to all mankind: it is not only our friends, that we are commanded to love, our neighbours, or our countrymen; but we are directed to subdue the violence of natural antipathies, and love those, who hate us; to extinguish the rancour of enmity by patience, of envy by humility, of malignity by kindness.

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THE necessity of submitting to the several duties of morality is so essentially interwoven with the general interests of society, that he who deviates furthest from those duties, will, in his moments of reflection, acknowledge, that his conduct is at variance with his reason. The duties of morality are binding on the common concerns of life; the force and value of its precepts are rendered palpable by every day's experience; and, what it is the concern of all to espouse and to enforce, an individual will seldom have the hardiness or folly to dispute.

§. 2. BUT while all men from motives of selfish and temporary interest concur in defining the limits of moral duty, the cause of religious truth, it has been thought, may be safely trusted to the private judgement of every individual. How far the interpretation of religious doctrines, which, as subjects of controversy, are connected with difficulties not suited to minds either unassisted or perverted, may be safely left to so capricious a criterion, we may collect from those diversities of judgement, which are formed on subjects of every day's occurrence; but especially from the great importance of religious opinions, and their distinguishing circumstances in different religions.

IF religion be of importance to mankind, even in this life, the truth of religious opinions cannot be a matter of indifference to Society. If we believe the religious doctrines, which we profess, to be revealed from God, such doctrines cannot be too anxiously protected from the corruptions of scepticism, and the errors of infidel philosophy; and the necessity for such protection will always be in proportion to the remoteness of the doctrines from the limited conceptions and ordinary experience of mankind. God will no doubt provide for the good of his creatures,
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and the support of true religion : we are assured that “ the “ gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” But where miracles cease, human means must operate, under providence, as the instruments of human happiness. The blessings of life, and health, and truth, which God has bestowed upon his creatures, they, as rational agents, must maintain by their best endeavours and provisions.

THE importance of religious opinions to mankind will be further evident, if we consider, that the peculiarity of religious opinions constitutes the specific difference of every religion. The followers of different religions are distinguished, not by the tenets, which they possess in common, but by those which they hold peculiar to themselves. By such distinctions the Jew is separated from the Heathen, the Mahometan from both of them, and the Christian from all.

THE Christian says, “ I believe Christianity to be true : and “ the records of this religion in the New Testament I believe “ to be authentic.” But what do those records consist of ? of facts, moral precepts, and religious doctrines. Therefore to *practice* the precepts, is one part of Christianity ; to *believe* the facts and doctrines is another.— If he proceed to particulars, the Christian says, “ I believe that Jesus Christ, the “ founder of Christianity, performed such great and notable miracles as prove his divine mission ; that he clearly and expressly “ taught the resurrection of the dead, and proved the truth of “ his doctrine by his own resurrection ; therefore, as I believe “ those facts to be true, I believe in the divine mission of “ Christ, and in the certainty of a future life.” So far all, who are denominated Christians, agree in their opinions of the truth

of Christianity.—But is this the *whole* truth? Are there no peculiar circumstances in the life and personal character of Christ; in the object and end of his mission; in the merits of his conduct; and the extent of his authority; which distinguish him from all other great prophets, and every merely human delegate from God? Are there no injunctions relating to himself, to which be expected belief as a duty from his disciples? Have we derived from the extraordinary circumstances of his birth, from his many discourses about himself and Him that sent him, and from the subsequent instructions of his Apostles, no other knowledge of the divine nature, than was known to mankind before the coming of our Saviour? In determining these questions a member of the Church of England differs in his religious opinions, or rather in his religious faith, much more from the Socinian, than the Socinian does from the disciple of Mahomet.

IF Christ had delivered only precepts of moral duty, however superior in purity to the injunctions of the Mosaic law; if he had, in addition to that morality, only assured to us the certainty of a future life, great and important as is the doctrine; we might still have ranked as Hebrews: the Pharisees believed the doctrine of the resurrection. The characteristic articles of Christianity we must collect from the doctrines of Redemption, Incarnation, Atonement, and Mediation.

By the credenda, then, of their faith, and not by precepts of morality, do different religions specifically differ: their moral precepts may, in some degree, distinguish them from each other, but they are characterized by their religious tenets.

THE importance of religious opinions is peculiarly obvious in this Country, and in the present day. It is the difference of religious opinions, which separates from the Church, the most repugnant of its Sectaries. Where the same doctrine is considered by the Church, as of divine authority, and by its enemies, as Idolatrous, to know the truth cannot be a matter of indifference to any Churchman. Where affection and attachment to a national Church depend, if not solely, yet principally, on the truth of the doctrines, which it professes, a clear conviction of the truth cannot be to any member of the establishment a matter of indifference. Above all, it cannot but be a concern of the first importance to every serious Christian, to be well persuaded of those doctrines, which constitute a disciple of Christ.

§. 3. IT is too obvious to be denied, that he cannot be a Christian, a disciple of Christ, who disavows the doctrines inculcated by Christ and his Apostles. They who differ most in their religious opinions, must agree in this acknowledgement. Yet among those, who are denominated Christians, some most decidedly believe, what others as strenuously deny; and yet all contend, that their doctrines are the doctrines of Christ. The Church of England enjoins as necessary articles of faith, because it believes them to be the doctrines of Christ and his Apostles, what the Socinian rejects as incredible, impossible, and unfounded in Scripture. Both cannot be right: to adhere to such contradictory opinions must be, it should seem, on one side or the other, the effect of great perverseness or misapprehension. It becomes therefore the adherents of both persuasions to consider well the grounds of the serious and important difference, which separates them from each other: it becomes us as mem-
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bers of the national establishment, and those of us especially, whose business it is to teach the doctrines of the Gospel. If Jesus Christ were a mere man, we are guilty of Idolatry in paying him divine worship; if Jesus Christ were a mere man, we are guilty of a pernicious delusion in pressing upon others the belief of his divinity. But if Jesus Christ was God as well as man; — if the Scriptures so declare him; — if his actions and declarations attest his divinity, and yet *we* deny it; whatever name the present boasted liberality of sentiment may allow us, we have no claim to the title of his disciples; we cannot be Christians.

§. 4. IN discussing questions of complicate inquiry, the difference of opinions has always been increased in proportion as the main question has been enveloped in accessory and subordinate difficulties. They not only enlarge the ground of controversy, but, by protracting the decision of the original subject, contribute more than any thing to embitter the contest between the advocates of different opinions. It becomes, too, thus infinitely more difficult to decide on the whole of an inquiry. For while the field of inquiry is thus enlarged, and the contest is carried on at a distance from the chief source of the dispute, there occur so many opportunities for sophistry and evasion, that the worst cause will assume an appearance of truth from the occasional success of particular arguments. It is therefore necessary for all, who would preserve their minds undisturbed by the arts of controversial misrepresentation, to keep the main principles and facts, with the combined evidence of their truth, in view, while they endeavour to pursue subordinate difficulties through the intricacies of sophistry and error. With the firm possession of any one clear proof of the
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great articles of our Faith, if difficulties occur, they may create embarrassment, but will never excite doubt.

THESE reflections, the younger part of my audience, to whom they are addressed, will apply to the historical disquisitions concerning the Divinity of Jesus Christ. No subject, perhaps, in its full extent involves more numerous difficulties. But these difficulties lie, not in the scriptural testimony itself, (for to an unprejudiced mind, as I hope to shew, nothing can be more express,) but in the authority, which we adopt for estimating the testimony, or in our criterion of the doctrine attested.

IF we desert the testimony of Scripture, and have recourse to the opinions and authority of the most learned writers subsequent to Christ and his Apostles, so many are the difficulties, which arise from the fallibility of the human understanding, and the inconstancy of human judgement, that those valuable monuments of Christian antiquity, the writings of the Fathers, which form so useful and ornamental a part of Christian knowledge, have supplied the opposers of Christ's divinity with materials of endless contention.

ON the other hand, if we make our own reason the criterion of the doctrine ; if we suffer it to be the arbiter not only of the literal testimony of scripture, (which in its true province,) not only of what is revealed, but of the probability and improbability of the doctrine :—in other words, if we reject the letter of Scripture, because we cannot comprehend the doctrine, instead of admitting the doctrine, because we cannot contradict the letter :—if such be the interposition of our reason, all dispute

pute about the Christian mysteries must be fruitless ; for between the properties of finite and infinite nature, there can be no common medium of comparison.

THE testimony of Scripture, then, is the surest and the most compendious evidence, and after every other testimony is still indispensable. For, if in what we consider as revealed doctrines, we are not supported by the language of revelation, all accessory authority is unavailable.

§. 5. BY those, who are not predisposed to contest the doctrine of Christ's divinity, the miraculous conception will be considered as an adequate proof, and the express declaration of his beloved Apostle, that he was that eternal and divine person, who was from the beginning not only with God, but was God. The declarations, however, of Christ himself interpreted by the *earliest testimony* concerning Christ, that can be brought, the testimony of his living witnesses, the Jews, will be less liable to objection. Whatever difficulties may on other occasions occur in the use of particular terms, the interpretation of the words of Christ by the evidence of his contemporaries and hearers, must free them from all ambiguity of meaning, and afford to the argument the full and express authority of *historical evidence*. If therefore it can be made appear, that Christ called himself the Son of God, in the proper and literal sense of these terms ; that he avowedly declared himself to be God, and equally God with the Father ; if these declarations can be proved from Scripture, unless we disclaim the title of Christians, we must believe in the divinity of Christ. For even those, who are most violent in their rejection of Christ's divinity, believe him to have been a great prophet, inspired by God, and consequently

consequently incapable of falshood. Christ's declarations must be true ; we want only adequate authority to determine their express meaning : and such authority, for reasons before mentioned, seems due to the attestations of the Jews.

THE earliest avowal, which Christ made, that he was the Son of God, was his answer to his Mother, and reputed Father, when, after much inquiry, they found him in the *Temple*.
 “ And when they saw him, they were amazed : and his Mother
 “ said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us ?
 “ Behold, thy Father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And
 “ he said, how is it that ye sought me ? [*that ye knew not*
 “ *where to find me ?*] wist ye not that I must be in my
 “ Father's house ?” * that is, *the house of God*, the Temple.
 St. Luke, ii. 48.

IN the course of the Gospels there is a variety of passages, in which our Saviour applies the terms, *the Father*, *the Son* to God and to himself, in so marked a relation to each other, that *Son of God* cannot be understood in the general sense, in which *Sons of God* are sometimes spoken of in Scripture.
 “ As the Father hath life in himself, in the same manner hath
 “ he given to the Son to have life in himself.—Whatsoever the
 “ Father doeth, that the Son doeth likewise.—No man
 “ knoweth, who the Son is, but the Father.” In language still more appropriate he calls himself *the only begotten Son of God*. “ God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten
 “ Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but
 “ have everlasting life.” The *only begotten Son* are the most

* *In my Father's house.*] So ought ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς μου οἰκίαι to be translated, instead of *about my Father's business*, as it is in the English Translation. See Wetstein's note on the passage, and Dr. Owen in Bowyer's Conjectures.

explicit terms, which in the imperfection of human language can be adopted to denote a Son consubstantial with the Father.

PROPHETS, and Saints, and holy Men, are in a spiritual and general sense, called *Sons of God*, and *the Sons of God*. But no one was ever called in Scripture personally and individually *the Son of God*, beside Jesus Christ; except the first man, Adam; and no one, *the only begotten Son of God*, except Jesus Christ alone.

It should be observed too, that the title of the "Son of God" did not originate in the reverence of his disciples, but in Christ's own declarations. No great prophet of the old Covenant ever assumed to himself the title of "the Son of God." Their sanctity and authority might justify others in calling them "Sons of God;" but no one before Jesus Christ published his commission from God, as the Son of God, and on that title founded his authority.

FROM the uniform application of the relative Terms, *the Father*, and *the Son*, to God and Jesus Christ, in the passages quoted, and their incongruity to any human being in the same appropriate language, we are led to conclude, that our Saviour meant to declare himself the Son of God in the strict and literal sense. And that this was his meaning, we are further authorized to think by the Jews, who heard him, and the evidence of the events, which were the consequences of these declarations. Thus the unbelieving Jews understood our Saviour to mean, when he called God his Father, considering the title of *the Son of God*, assumed by him, as implying divinity, and equality with the Father. "My Father, said he, worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought
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“ the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the
 “ Sabbath, but said also, that God was his Father, making
 “ himself *equal with God*.”

ON another occasion our Saviour, perhaps, still more expressly asserted his divinity, and consubstantiality with the Father, where he says, “ I and my Father are one.” Those who are unwilling to admit the divinity of Jesus Christ, say that these words mean only that, “ I and God have one purpose to
 “ pursue, one end to accomplish.” But we may again appeal to the Jews, his living witnesses, who accused him of blasphemy, and were going to stone him. “ Jesus answered them,
 “ Many good works have I shewn you from my Father: for
 “ which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered
 “ him, saying, for a good work we stone thee not: but for
 “ blasphemy, and because that thou being a Man, *makest*
 “ *thyself God*.”

THE last declaration, which Jesus Christ made of his divinity, was that for which he was condemned to the Cross; and the amplest testimony of the express meaning of the declaration, is the sentence pronounced on him, as a blasphemer, for calling himself the Son of God. “ The high Priest asked
 “ him, and said unto him, art thou the Christ, *the Son of the*
 “ *Blessed*? And Jesus said, *I am*. And ye shall see the Son of
 “ Man sitting on the right hand of Power, and coming in the
 “ clouds of heaven. Then the high Priest rent his Clothes,
 “ and said, what need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard
 “ the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned
 “ him to be worthy of death.”

FROM the previous conduct of the Jews, Jesus Christ knew that they did not consider the title, which he assumed, as the title merely of a great Prophet; or in the general sense, in which they were accustomed to call all Men Sons of God, as the children of one common parent; for such title would not have been charged with blasphemy, that is, the presumptuous pretension of being God, and equal with God. He knew too that to assume this title at his trial, in the sense, in which they had before understood it, without correcting their mistake, if they had mistaken his meaning, must expose him to the last severities of their law. Yet at the time of his trial, in the last hours of his life, he did assume it in the most open and decided terms, which left in the mind of the high Priest no room to doubt of the blasphemy, of which Jesus Christ had been accused.

FROM the authority, then, of Christ's own declarations, the attestations of the Jews, and the evidence of his death, it is clear that Jesus Christ professed himself to be *the Son of God*, in the proper and literal sense of those terms, and therefore God,—equal with God,—and one with God. And as Jesus Christ was incapable of falsehood, it follows that he was truly God;—God, to whom are due our most devout and grateful adorations, as to him, by whom all things were created; to him, who has assured us that he will always be present with us in the midst of our devotions; to him, who has promised, that “if we ask any thing in his name, HE will do it.” John xiv. 14.

§. 6. THIS eternal and divine person, for the great purposes of Man's redemption, for the completion of that atonement, which

which was to be made for Man, took on himself the form of Man, and to the divine nature united the human. No evidence is wanting to prove the humanity of Jesus Christ. To prove the union of the two natures, is, perhaps, as unnecessary after the evidence, which we possess of his divinity. If Christ's own testimony prove the existence of one nature, his whole life, his sufferings, and his death prove the other. But the express declarations of our Saviour respecting his præexistence, his descent from heaven, his invisible and divine nature distinct from his visible and human, while they afford additional proofs of his divinity, point out in more explicit terms the union of the two natures.

WHEN the Jews asked our Saviour, "where is your Father?" he answered, ye neither know me, nor my Father. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also." On another occasion, he said, "No Man knoweth, who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son." When he addressed these words to the Jews, who were present with him, and before whom he had been accustomed to call God his Father, and himself the Son, he must have referred to some invisible nature distinct from his human person. It is clear from our Saviour's words, that the Father and the Son were equally unknown to Mankind, and consequently, that the Son in his invisible and essential nature, was equally divine with the Father. To the same præexistent and divine nature he referred, when he said, "Ye are from beneath; I am from above. Ye are of this world: I am not of this world.—I came down from heaven.—No one hath ascended into heaven, except he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man, who is in heaven.—What and if ye shall
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“ see the Son of Man ascend up, where he was before?—
 “ Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am.—
 “ I am from the beginning.—Now, O Father, glorify thou
 “ me with the glory, which I had with thee, before the world
 “ was.” Some of these passages, when detached from their
 proper places in Scripture, or from each other, may appear,
 perhaps, susceptible of other meanings: but when compared
 with each other, and especially with the passages, in which
 Christ asserts his divinity, they carry only one meaning, the
 præexistence of Christ, and the union in him of the divine and
 human nature.

§. 7. WHEN in the same person are united two natures so
 dissimilar in their attributes, so different in their functions, as
 the divine and the human, there must necessarily be as great a
 difference in the force of the expressions, which are applied,
 on different occasions, to this person. With respect to these
 different natures, the Son of God will be both equal and un-
 equal to his Father, will be one with God, and yet different
 from him: and though equally God with the Father in one
 capacity, in the other the same person will be both his Father
 and his God. Though it is as difficult for us to conceive the
 union of the divine and human nature in Jesus Christ, as the
 union of immaterial and material nature in a mere Man, yet
 as we have the authority of Christ himself for the doctrine, if the
 belief of his doctrines constitutes the title of a Christian, it is
 presumption to dissent; it is our duty as Christians to believe.

OUR Saviour's declarations of his præexistent and divine
 nature are so direct and positive, that their meaning cannot be
 evaded but by a latitude and perverseness of interpretation,
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which would discredit the judgement of a Scholar in his explanation of any profane writer. The *meaning* of our Saviour's declaration, the Jews, who heard him, understood, as we do, who believe in Christ's divinity. But the hardness of their hearts, and the perverseness of their understandings, prevented their *belief* of his testimony. They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know; how is it then, that he saith, I came down from heaven?" It was a hard saying, very hard to be believed by those, who did not admit the authority of the Speaker: it gave offence even to many of his disciples, who went back, and walked no more with him. It was one of those hard sayings, which they were not then able to bear; which they were to hear, but not to understand, till all things were compleated. But it was an express and unambiguous saying, as appeared from its effects on his hearers. *They* understood the meaning of his declarations, but did not believe his testimony: *we* believe the testimony, because it is *his* testimony; for he "knew, whence he came, and whither he was to go: they knew not whence he came, nor whither he was to go."

UPON the whole of this evidence of our Saviour's divinity it seems worthy of remark, that the doctrine of the divinity of Christ did not originate in the reverence of his disciples, but in his own declarations:—that these declarations were attested not only by the Evangelists, who record them, and believed them, but by his enemies, who disbelieved them:—that the doctrine does not depend on a single passage of Scripture, but on many passages;—not on disputable terms, but on the evidence of historical facts;—and (if we descend from this period) not merely on the opinions of the day, but on the
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the doctrines, religious discipline, and habits of eighteen centuries.

§. 8. How this mysterious union of divine and human nature in Jesus Christ could exist, it is impossible for human faculties to comprehend. It is sufficient for us to know, that God has so revealed it in his Scriptures, and to bend, in humble and grateful acquiescence, to the revelation, which God has made.

To ask, why God should command us to believe, what it is impossible for us to comprehend, is to forget the very nature and end of a revealed religion. To ask, why God did not make his revelation *more* express, is to neglect the decisive authority of what is already express for difficulties, which contribute only to fruitless disputation, and to the exercise of that pernicious vanity, which is disposed to reject all opinions, which are received, and all authority, which is acknowledged and established.

THE presumption of attempting to investigate the *reasons* of revealed mysteries, and of disbelieving them, because we are unable to find any relative analogies in the properties of finite matter, cannot be better exposed, than in the forcible language of the book of Wisdom: “ For what Man is he,
 “ that can know the counsel of God; or can think, what the
 “ will of the Lord is? For the thoughts of mortal Man are
 “ miserable, and our devices but uncertain.—Hardly do we
 “ guess aright at the things, that are upon earth, and with
 “ labour do we find the things that are before us: but the
 “ things that are in heaven, who hath searched out? And thy
 “ counsel,

“ counsel, who hath known, except thou give wisdom, and
 “ send thy holy spirit from above ? ”

II. BUT if the doctrine of Christ's divinity be so clear in its original testimonies, and so well supported by ancient and permanent belief, it may well be asked, whence it has arisen, that there has been, and still is, amongst different sects, so great a difference of opinions about the Christian creed ? For of those, who call themselves Christians, there are many, who deny the divinity of Jesus Christ, and yet fully believe his divine mission.

§. 1. THE divine origin of the Christian religion is indeed one thing, and the divinity of its founder another ; yet the mere difference of opinions tends as little to disprove the divinity of the Founder, as the divine origin of his Religion. There are many causes for difference of opinions on all subjects, but especially on the subject of religion, such as *incapacity*, *inattention*, *prejudice*, and *vanity*, the vanity of misdirected reason.

§. 2. EVERY mind has a *capacity* for truth, inasmuch as every mind is capable of admitting the truth, and believing it. The sublimest mysteries of the Christian faith, how much soever they may exceed the measure of our conceptions, if we submit to the testimony and authority of Scripture, demand our belief without doing violence to our reason. The *incapacity* of an uneducated mind consists not in the inability to receive truth, but in its incompetency, amongst a variety of discordant opinions, to arrive at truth by regular deduction, to discover the fallacies of sophistry and error, and the subterfuges of defective argument. A mind unprepared by education, un-

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fortified by habits of reasoning and discrimination, is too often incapable of adhering to its original persuasions, when exposed to the seductions of Profelytism, and the earnest expostulations of Enthusiasm. It is this incapacity to discriminate the truth of opposite opinions, which renders improper all appeals to their judgement on disputed doctrines. They are disturbed by the contrariety or opposition of sentiments and doctrines, which they are unable to appreciate: and are more easily impressed by a bold, unsupported objection to received opinions, than susceptible of the reasoning, which supports them.

§. 3. OTHERS are often misled from the truth by difficulties and objections, which are of weight only because they are not examined. Many, who are every way qualified to judge for themselves, and who act with discernment in the ordinary concerns of life, are often precluded from the due use of their judgement in abstract inquiries by occupations, which have no connexion with researches after truth. The honours, the riches, or pleasures of this life, so occupy the attention, that too little of it is devoted to the study of religion, or employed in estimating the reasons of the faith, which they profess. This negligence sometimes involves them in doubts; for if they possess not firmly the chief principles of their faith, and attend not to the connexion, which unites the several arguments in evidence of any religious truth, a thousand difficulties occur, which they cannot solve. Doubts, which are easily raised by the most inattentive, are not removed without considerable exertion of the understanding: they sink easily into the mind at one impression; but often require a long series of well connected proofs to disperse them. And while they neglect to search for the solution of their difficulties, from doubts they pass

pass to incredulity. Their first difficulties are ultimately confirmed by the very existence of those difficulties. For how, say they, can it be supposed that God would deliver for the instruction of mankind abstruse doctrines, which the wisest of Men cannot comprehend? or, would subject to doubts and disputation, those truths, in which is involved the eternal happiness of mankind?

To these difficulties we may reply that the introduction of the Gospel was *not* to change the *whole* nature of Man; it was not to deprive him of free will; it was not, against a man's own will, and without his own exertion, to eradicate the many causes, which in the present state of our nature act as obstacles to the reception of truth. Can we wonder at the existence of difficulties and dissensions, which Christ himself foresaw and predicted? Can we wonder at the existence of dissensions about articles of faith, when the most enlightened period of Christianity has seen advanced the most opposite opinions about the first injunctions of natural and moral duty, about the plainest principles of right and wrong?

SUCH doubts, if indulged, would induce us to arraign the whole moral government of God. We might as well ask, why God, by giving us the noble privilege of free agency, should expose us to the commission of Sin? why not rather by one perpetual miracle prevent the possibility of error?

BUT to such difficulties there can be no issue: they are doubts, which it is as fruitless to raise, as it is presumptuous to pursue. Such doubts and difficulties originate in the inattention and perverseness of our own minds. Unless mankind

were divested of free will, the constant agency of miracles themselves would not protect them from the delusions of prejudice and inattention. "They have Moses and the Prophets,"—they have Christ and his Apostles,—“if they will not hear them, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.” The scriptures are a plain, intelligible rule for the direction of our faith, and the conduct of our lives. And if we were all to trust to the simplicity and sincerity of our first impressions in reading the Scriptures, no one would doubt of the divine origin of the Christian religion, or the divinity of its Founder.

BUT the doctrines, which we collect from Scripture, such as the doctrines of the Trinity, and the divinity of Christ, they say, are abstruse, speculative, metaphysical doctrines, which the wisest of Men cannot comprehend.—They are certainly *incomprehensible* to us; it is this very incomprehensibility of the doctrines which rendered necessary the interposition of divine revelation; but they are not more so, than the universality of the divine presence, or the union of two infinitely dissimilar natures, material and immaterial, in Man: they are *speculative* doctrines; for they include no articles of practical duty to our fellow-creatures; but as articles of belief, revealed to us by Christ, they are objects of intellectual and practical duty to God: they are *metaphysical* doctrines; for they are not to be collected from any of the predicaments of body, any of the analogies of material and physical existence; but though necessarily, to us, metaphysical and speculative in their nature, and incomprehensible in their modes, yet, as simple propositions of God's word, they are in themselves neither difficult nor abstruse. If indeed we were left to collect the mysteries of divine Truth by laboured analysis and recondite investigation, they might justly be

be called abstruse and difficult : “ they would be hid from babes, “ and known only to the wise and prudent : ” and the proportions of divine knowledge would vary with the different degrees of intellectual capacity. But to *know* God, as he is *made known* to us by the scriptures, requires only a mind properly regulated by a consciousness of its own imperfections. All abstract inquiry into the nature and modes of the divine existence is superseded by the authority of revelation. The scriptural declarations of the divine nature are presented to us as facts, which depend on the testimony of him, who revealed them : and it is not required of us to be wise above what is written. The promises of Christ are bound by the simplest conditions addressed to the imperfection of our nature : “ Believe, and thou “ shalt be saved.”

§. 4. IF inattention expose Men to seduction from the truth, prejudice retains them in error. The prejudice of *inveterate opinion* may equally affect those who adhere to the truth, as those who have deviated from it. On one side it creates the bigotry of blind attachment, on the other, the bigotry of perverse dissent. Some men it induces to adhere to their old persuasions, without examining the grounds of opposite opinions ; while others examine, state, refute with partiality and misrepresentation. In discussing the opinions of their opponents, they select the weaker arguments, which are to the whole only subordinate illustrations, and neglect the principal arguments, and the sum of their combined evidence.

THE prejudice of *self-interest*, is equally powerful in its effects on the opinions and conduct of contending parties. If a sense of self-interest were sufficient to induce the members of
any

any establishment to defend its doctrines against their better judgement, the same motive will act with at least an equal impulse on the conduct of dissenters from it, and stimulate them, in their wishes to subvert an establishment, whose doctrines they condemn, and from whose emoluments they are excluded, to attack with groundless objections, and vilify with invidious invective, its doctrines and authority. To the influence of self-interest in perverting the judgement must be added other powerful motives, which almost exclusively affect dissenters from establishments, the desire of victory, with the jealousy of inferior numbers, and contracted privileges.

§. 5. BUT of all the sources productive of diversity in religious opinions, there is none more fruitful, than the vanity of that pernicious error, which considers human reason, as an adequate criterion of all truth, and deems all doctrines, which are above human reason, or contrary to it, to be impossible and untrue.—We cannot say that whatever is above reason is impossible, because there are so many things even in the operations of material nature, and the functions of animal life, which we know to exist, but which we cannot account for. We cannot say, that whatever is above human reason is contrary to human reason, because it is impossible to find in the properties of finite matter any common medium of comparison to estimate the essential properties of an infinite being. We cannot say, that whatever is contrary to human reason is contrary to the supreme reason, because it is absurd to conclude from the limited powers of finite beings against the possibilities of omnipotence.

III. ON the grounds of this error and its many fallacies, I forbear to enlarge: but it may not be improper to point out
some

some of its consequences, which terminate in opinions and measures, which very materially affect not only the stability of our national Church, but the permanency of the Christian faith.

§. 1. THE misapplication of human reason to subjects, to which its powers are incompetent, adds strength and action, reciprocally, to that principle of vanity, which gives it birth, *an overweening opinion of our own judgement*. It disposes us to undervalue the most deliberate decisions of the greatest numbers, learning, and experience; and to consider the mere dissent from general persuasions as a proof of peculiar discernment and force of mind; and thus becomes an invincible obstacle to the recognition and acknowledgement of error.

§. 2. ONE necessary consequence of this vain pretension, is, that it induces its advocates to controvert even *the authority of Scripture*, where it does not accord with their own judgement. For though they profess to appeal to Scripture, and even solicit its authority, its testimony, under such circumstances, is evaded by the imputation of figurative expression, or denied in the charge of interpolation.

§. 3. IF the authority of Scripture is evaded or denied, it is no wonder, that another consequence, and a very extensive one in its effects, should be to disclaim *all human authority in matters of religion*. The advocates of this opinion avow the most inveterate aversion to all established ordinances of public worship, to all the decencies and subordinations of Church government, and to all doctrines and creeds espoused by an established Church. They consider all restrictions, in any way annexed

annexed to the profession of religious opinions, however contrary to the religion by law established, as infringements of natural right; and, lastly, deny in principle, though in their civil conformities they acknowledge, the prerogative of civil supremacy in matters of religion.

§. 4. ANOTHER consequence is the extension of *free-thinking* under the specious titles of *liberality of sentiment*, and *freedom of inquiry*. This freedom of inquiry has presented to the public little more than a series of experiments on religion, and on the laws, the public guardians of religion. It has exhibited a spectacle very painful to all sincere friends of religion and religious truth, (except the experimentalists themselves,) the vain efforts of an active, powerful, but irregular mind, in its aberrations from one impiety to another, in the pursuit of truth; and, like the blind heathen governour, inquiring for the truth, though surrounded by its brightness.

IT was usual, we are told, with the experimentalists in Physics in the last age, to labour their experiments with the most diligent exactness, and to withhold them from the public, till by frequently repeated trials and the most patient observation they had tried all means to determine their phenomena. The practice of the present day is more communicative, because, probably, it has been found, that in the free communication of *such* experiments the public is much more benefitted by disseminating principles of natural knowledge, and a love of philosophical inquiry, than the reputation of individuals can suffer by precipitation or inaccuracy. Indeed to *physical* experiments there is every inducement. The properties of material nature afford ample scope for observation and discovery, and encouragement

agement for the exertion of human industry. God has not placed any limits to such inquiries by express revelation. A display of the mechanism of this Creation was not necessary to our future happiness, and would have diminished the means of present happiness by precluding from the mind a very copious source of that satisfaction, which arises from the exertion of its powers.

UNFORTUNATELY this spirit of *unlimited inquiry*, and *extemporaneous communication* has extended itself to the investigation and discussion of divine truth, for which the very nature of the subject rendered it unfit. The properties of immaterial and infinite nature afford no scope to our observation, no encouragement to our inquiries, and no criterion for our judgment,—except the express word of God. Mankind never could have known the mysteries of true religion, but by revelation from God. For though our fears, our hopes, and gratitude might have collected from the works of nature many striking evidences of a superior power and divine intelligence, yet how weak, how inconstant, how corrupt our notions of the divine nature would have been, we may know from the history of religion amongst the more enlightened nations of antiquity. The most extended communications of human experience, the utmost exertions of human genius, never could have discovered the divine truths of Christianity. But the latent and inscrutable nature of those truths, as it was impossible for us to discover,—so has God's Revelation precluded all other inquiry. Our experiments can extend no further than the written evidences of that Revelation. As it was communicated to Man through the vehicle of human language, our perceptions of the

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revelation may be subject to the common imperfections of our nature, and may be impeded by the natural defects of language. But if the difficulties, which either or both of these causes may produce, be sufficient to make us doubtful, whether the doctrines, which enter into the common belief of Christians, and the articles of our national religion, are so revealed in Scripture, it is incautious at least to disseminate such doubts, as subjects of polemical experiment, without producing the most decisive proofs of error, that is, of deviation from scriptural authority, in the received doctrines: very disrespectful to the public to charge them with mistaken opinions without having any settled opinion of our own: and very injurious to society, by destroying many a good man's best blessing, his peace of mind, without affording him any consolation for his loss in the hopes of a more secure conscience, and more permanent belief.

INNUMERABLE are the arts, which have been employed to prepare the way for the easier currency of what every believer in the divinity of Christ must consider as the most anti-christian, impious opinions. Attempts have been made to reduce into one community all the different denominations of Men, who call themselves Christians. *Comprehensive liturgies* have been formed, which banish from the language of its devotions all allusions to obnoxious tenets. It is obvious to collect, what advantage such comprehensive forms would be to all, or many of those, who dissent from the national Church; but it is not easy to see, what benefit would thence arise to religion at large; or how such worship can be thought more acceptable to God, than the sincere devotions of separate communions.

OR rather it is easy to see, that the injury to Christianity would be very great by the irreparable loss, which the inferior ranks of society would sustain by such generalizing and comprehensive modes of worship. All who believe in the divinity of our Saviour, in the efficacy of his death, and the merits of his atonement, would be deprived of the most powerful motives to the newness of a good life, and the best assured hopes of forgiveness for the sins, negligences and ignorances of their past life: and would lose at once the best human means of keeping them firm in the principles of the Christian faith. For, debarred as they are by the laborious occupations of their lives from the frequent study of the Scriptures, the most effectual means of preventing, in them, the total oblivion of all religious and moral truth, peculiar to the Christian revelation, is, to unite in their devotions the principles of Christian faith and moral duty.

UPON the same extended plan of religious communication, *comprehensive schemes of religious education* have been recommended and established, not indeed always with the same views, but, as it should seem, with the same disadvantages to the Christian faith. There is certainly great appearance of charity in the motive for adopting such a course of religious instruction, as should comprehend the children of all denominations; and real charity no doubt has influenced the minds of many, who have acquiesced in such proposals. But it does not seem that the interests of religion, or the success of parochial instruction, can be promoted by such accommodations.

IT may indeed be said, that the Christian mysteries are not comprehensible to a Child.— No: nor to the most cultivated

and enlarged understanding. Doctrines therefore which cannot be made comprehensible to the utmost perfection of human reason, can never so well be taught as in the most docile state of the mind, before it has acquired the presumption of rejecting, whatever it does not comprehend.

AND however great may be the difference in the religious opinions of different sects, every individual must be convinced, that the doctrines, which he believes to be true, cannot be believed too early; and that what the general advantages of early education render necessary for all children, become doubly so in the education of the poor, who have so little time to learn at all, what they are eternally interested in knowing well.

§. 5. To facilitate the progress of their reformation in religious opinions, the advocates of free inquiry have recast the annals of Christian Antiquity. The most defective representations of Church History have been presented to the public as pictures of primitive faith; while doctrines of Evangelical and Apostolical truth have been exhibited as Corruptions of Christianity.—Indecent and violent attacks have been made on the national liturgy and Church; violent from their acrimony, and indecent both from their violence, and their contempt of subsisting laws.—The most uncharitable aspersions have been thrown on the ministers of the Church for their conformity to her doctrines, and on all firm adherents to the establishment.—Seditious appeals have been made to the passions of the people to seduce them from the respect and benevolence, which they owe to their teachers in religion, and their reverence for the doctrines and ordinances of the national Church.

§. 6.

§. 6. OF this free-thinking, or liberality of sentiment, in religion, one mischievous effect is its tendency, by obliterating all distinctions of names, sects, and doctrines, to produce an indifference for all religious opinions, which are not recognized by the religion of nature, and an aversion to all established creeds, all prescribed forms, and articles of communion. To abandon any one of those doctrines, which we believe to be revealed from God by his Son, is not liberality of sentiment, but desertion of the cross of Christ : to do this, that we may accomodate our faith to the opinions of unbelievers, is an accommodation, which, it is to be feared, no political expediency, no temporal advantages, no human motives can justify. Liberality of sentiment in religion is that spirit of charity, which induces us, while *we contend earnestly for the faith*, to think that others may hold religious opinions different from our own without the influence of worldly motives, without hypocrisy, or insanity.

§. 7. THE prevalence of the principles before noticed would inevitably create disaffection to the national Church, or indifference for its welfare; a disregard for the laws intended for its protection, and a disposition to promote, or admit civil innovations however inimical to its interests; interests, which by many analogies appear to be intimately connected with the prosperity of the whole national establishment; as the existing laws are with the preservation of the essential articles of Christianity,

WHEN we are told therefore that the civil magistrate has no right to interfere in concerns of religion, that all religious opinions are matters of indifference to Society, and that all
forms

forms of religious communion and instruction should be made so general and comprehensive as to admit sects of all denominations; if at the same time we reflect, that the admission of such principles is necessary to the completion of certain long projected, and long laboured innovations in our civil and religious constitution; we have every reason to consider such principles as some of the trains, which communicate with that mine, which, we are told by the enemies of our Church themselves, has been so long preparing for explosion.

SEEING therefore the mutual connexion between the civil and religious constitution of this country; between the essential truths of Christianity, the doctrines of the national Church, and the laws enacted for its protection; and that the principles before touched upon have some a remote, some an immediate tendency to subvert the national establishment, and the essential articles of the Christian faith; the progress of such principles cannot better be opposed than by a rational and firm attachment to the national Church, founded on a decided conviction of those religious truths, which it professes. That we may not therefore suffer ourselves to be misled by the doubts and prejudices, the sophistical and partial objections of philosophical unbelievers, let us keep steadily in view that weight of evidence, by which the sacred writings are authenticated more amply and circumstantially than any other ancient book. Let us protect our belief from the perplexity of subordinate difficulties, by imprinting on our minds those clear and decisive passages in the sacred writings, which contain the words of Christ himself, and the doctrines of our faith. Let them be “as signs on our hands, and frontlets between our eyes.” Let

us reflect with humility on those mysterious and awful revelations, which God has made known to us, and which our imperfect reason would have been unable by the light of nature to discover. Let us pray to God to preserve our minds from the vanity of misdirected and presumptuous reason ; from the delusions of inattention, indifference and prejudice ; and from that source of innumerable prejudices and errors, a spirit of opposition to every thing received, of resistance to all authority, and repugnance to all establishment.

NOTES.

I.

PAG. I. *mysteries, which admit of no comparison*] This may be asserted without exception to what is called the Platonic doctrine of the Trinity. Plato's three principles, the *αγαθόν*, the *νοῦς*, and the *ψυχὴ*, the essential and actuating principles of the Universe have no resemblance to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, except in the circumstance of *number*. They were considered as three distinct principles infused through the universe, and inseparable from it, not as three persons (or hypostases, or distinctions, or whatever other name human language may afford to denote what the human intellect cannot comprehend) in *one and the same God*. The *νοῦς* and *ψυχὴ* are never said to be coessential with the *αγαθόν*, equal with the *αγαθόν*, and one with the *αγαθόν*. And yet these three important differences render the Platonic *triad* essentially unlike to the Christian *trinity*.

II.

P. 2. *errors of scepticism, and corruptions of infidel philosophy*] That genuine Philosophy should have any tendency to destroy religion, or corrupt our religious opinions, is impossible: but that some sort of it, or some misapplication of it, is capable of producing such effects, we may assert on the authority of a Philosopher himself. Dr. Priestley says (in the Preface to his Letters to Mr. Burn, p. viii.) that "the greater part of his philosophical acquaintance ridicule his belief of Christianity." Dr. Priestley has many philosophical acquaintance on

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the Continent, and it is to be hoped for the credit of our country, that *the greater part* is there.—In his note to this passage he says, that “when he was at Paris, after a very free and serious conversation on the subject of religion he was told by one of the company, that he was the only person they had ever met with, of whose understanding they had any opinion, who pretended to believe Christianity.”—In the same note he says, that “a very sincere Catholic priest hearing, that on all occasions he avowed his belief of Christianity, embraced him with tears literally running down his cheeks, saying that all, who were called *philosophers*, that he had met with before, were *atheists*.”—In a country, where, from this account, all sense of *religion* appears to be extinguished, or all belief of *Christianity*, we cannot wonder at the measures, which have been pursued against the *religious* establishment; but it is matter of great astonishment, that the conduct of such a nation should be seriously proposed as a model of *religious reform* to any *Christian* country.

III.

P. 2, 3, &c.] An objecter to the importance of religious opinions may say, that practical duties are *more* important than religious opinions. But it is a reflection like many others on similar occasions, totally foreign to the subject. It implies the denial of what is not denied. The importance of practical duties is not questioned, nor any comparison attempted. Whether faith or good works in a *Christian* be more acceptable to God, is a question of fruitless curiosity, if not of dangerous tendency. It is fruitless to inquire which of two acts of duty be the more acceptable, where both are indispensable: and dangerous, it should seem, to form comparisons of two indispensable duties, where the preference of one tends to the depreciation of the other. But there is another defect in the reflection, which is, its excluding religious belief, or faith, from the number of *practical* duties. To believe a doctrine revealed to us by God, is as much an act of practical duty to God, which we owe to the authority of Revelation, as Charity is a practical duty to our fellow creatures. Cowley says of Craslow,

“His *faith*, perhaps, in some nice tenets might

“Be wrong; his *life* I’m sure, was in the right.”

Pope in his imitation of this passage has gone beyond his original, as much in sentiment as in harmony:

“For

“For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight,
“His can’t be wrong, whose life is in the right.”

which in plain prose amounts to this strange inconsequence: “he cannot neglect his duty to God, who fulfills his duty to his neighbour; he cannot violate the first four commandments of the decalogue, who keeps the other six.” That such a sentiment should have imposed on the author and many others after him, is a striking proof of the force of harmony and contrast.

IV.

P. 6. *If Jesus Christ was God as well as man, if his actions and declarations attest his divinity, and yet we deny it, — we cannot be Christians.*]

Τοιούτους εἶναι ἀνδράς, ὁμολογούντας ἑαυτοὺς εἶναι Χριστιανούς, καὶ τὸν γεγραμμένον Ἰησοῦν ὁμολογεῖν καὶ Κυρίον καὶ Χριστόν, καὶ μὴ τὰ ἐκείνου διδάγματα διδάσκοντας, ἀλλὰ τὰ ἀπὸ τοῦ τοῦ πνεύματος, [Sic R. Steph.] — Εἰσὶν οὖν καὶ ἐγένοντο, ὡ φίλοι ἀνδρες, πολλοὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ καὶ βλασφημία λεγέειν καὶ πράττειν ἐδιδάξαν, ἐν ὀνόματι τοῦ Ἰησοῦ προσελθόντες· καὶ εἰσὶν ὑφ’ ἡμῶν ἀπὸ τῆς προσωνυμίας τῶν ἀνδρῶν, ἐξ οὐπὲρ ἑκάστη διδασκαλὴ καὶ γνώμη ᾗρξαστο· ἄλλοι γὰρ κατ’ ἄλλον τρόπον βλασφημεῖν τὸν ποιητὴν τῶν ὅλων, καὶ τὸν ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ προφητευόμενον εὐσεβεῖν Χριστόν, καὶ τὸν Θεὸν Ἀβραάμ, καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ διδάσκουσιν· ὡς οὐδὲν κοινῶνουμεν, οἱ γνωρίζοντες ἀδελφούς, καὶ ἀσέβεις, καὶ ἀδίκους καὶ ἀνόμους αὐτοὺς ὑπαρχόντας, καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ σέβειν, ὀνόματι μόνον ὁμολογεῖν. Justin Martyr. Dial. C. Tryph. ed. Thirlb. p 207.

“There are some Men, who call themselves Christians, and acknowledge the crucified Jesus as their Lord and Christ, yet teach not his doctrines, but those of the spirit of error.—There are, and have been, many denominated Christians, who have taught their followers to deny God and blaspheme him in their words and actions; who derive their appellations from the authors of their respective doctrines. For the leaders of these sects have each, in their different ways, taught their followers to blaspheme the maker of the Universe, and him, who by his prophets he had foretold should come, CHRIST, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: with whom we hold no communion knowing them to be dishonourers of God and religion, and despisers of the laws: who, acknowledging Jesus in name only, refuse to pay him divine worship.”

Dr. Priestley asserts (in his *Corruptions of Christianity*) that “Justin Martyr, who maintains the præexistence of Christ, is so far from calling the contrary opinion a *heresy*, that what he says on the subject is evidently an apology for his own.” (Vol. II. p. 486.) The reader will make his own comment on this passage compared with the sentiments of Justin here quoted. — Dr. Priest-

ley and Mr. Lindsey assert that divinity was not ascribed to Christ before Justin: yet the Apostate Julian bears testimony to St. John's declaration that Jesus was God; *Τοι γὰρ Ἰησοῦν οὔτε Παῦλος ἐτολμήσεν εἰπεῖν Θεόν, οὔτε Ματθαῖος, οὔτε Λουκᾶς, οὔτε Μάρκος, — ἀλλ' ὁ χρεῖος Ἰωάννης.* — St. Matthew, St. Luke, and St. Mark, though they do not in their own words declare the divinity of Christ, yet do sufficiently so by the facts, which they record. To the evidence of facts St. John, who published his Gospel after the other Evangelists, adds the testimony of his own express declaration. Dr. Jortin quotes the passage of Julian, (*Tracts*, Vol. I. p. 402.) and at the same time remarks the injudiciousness of the Socinian Criticism on St. John I. 1.

V.

P. 8. *If in what we consider as revealed doctrines we are not supported by the language of revelation, all accessory authority is unavailable.*] Dr. Priestley in his letter to Mr. Barnard, says, "You think it extraordinary, that I should have recourse to such guides as the Fathers to settle my opinion concerning the doctrine of the Trinity; thinking, I suppose that the study of the *scriptures* might render all other helps unnecessary. Now I have more than once given my reasons for this conduct. It is, in short, this — Christians are not agreed in the interpretation of *scripture language*; but as all men are agreed with respect to the nature of *historical evidence*, I thought that we might perhaps better determine by history what was the faith of Christians in early times independently of any aid from the scriptures; and it appeared to be no unnatural presumption, that whatever *that* should appear to be, such was the doctrine of the Apostles, from whom that faith was derived."

On this passage there are two obvious remarks to be made. (1.) That as much as *historical evidence*, (that is, the evidence of facts, general persuasions, and habits,) is preferable to the evidence of disputable terms; so much contemporary evidence is of weight superior to subsequent testimony; consequently that *Gospel* and *Apostolical history* are the proper evidences of *Gospel truth*. (2.) That to determine the opinions of the Apostles concerning the person of Christ from the writings of the Fathers without consulting the writings of the Apostles themselves, is as præ-posterous as it would be to determine the judgement of Aristotle on the modes of legitimate reasoning and persuasion from his commentators without consulting the *Organon* and *Rhetoric*: or to estimate the doctrines of Plato, not from his own works, but from the different sects of the Academy, and the still greater heresies of the Alexandrine School.

VI.

VI.

P. 11. *said that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.*] The testimony of the Jews is confirmed by the Apostle in his Epistle to the Philippians, ii. 6. "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be *"equal with God:"* that is, who being in the likeness of God, or of the same nature with God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, sine injuria, or suo jure sibi vindicandam existimavit æqualitatem cum Deo. Mr. Lindsey (in his *Second Address to the Students of Oxford and Cambridge*, p. 263.) translates the passage quoted in the Sermon, "making himself *like* unto God;" but does not produce a single instance from the Greek Testament, or any Greek writer, to shew that ἴσος was ever used in the sense of similitude *without equality*. In the passage from the Epistle to the Philippians he translates το εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ *like unto God*. But *likeness* to God (ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπαρχών) is expressed in the beginning of the verse, as the reason of Christ's το εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ. So that, if the latter term meant only *similitude* to God, the sentiment would run thus: "who being in the *"form of God, that is, in the likeness of God thought it not robbery to be like unto God;"* a tautology, which, independently of other reasons, renders Mr. Lindsey's translation inadmissible.

Mr. Lindsey has been unfortunate in the choice of a passage, which he has selected (p. 263.) to correct in his note to the passage from St. John before quoted. "Our Translators have fallen into a similar mistake" [similar to their translating ἴσος, *equal*] "in Luke xx. 36. where ἰσαγγελοὶ should be rendered, *"not equal, but like unto the angels.* For it is not an equality to those heavenly beings in rank and faculties, which our Lord here authorizes his virtuous and sincere followers to expect immediately in the future world, at the resurrection; but only a more perfect, and unperishing condition of being." The meaning of ἴσοι in ἰσαγγελοὶ is clearly determined by its subject. If they were not to be equal to the Angels in rank and faculties, (about which however the passage is totally silent,) they *were* to be equal to them in immortality. This "unperishing condition of being" they were to enjoy *equally* with the Angels, and therefore they are called ἰσαγγελοὶ: "neither can they die any more; for *"they are equal unto the Angels."* Whether ἰσαγγελοὶ be translated *like* unto the Angels, or *equal*, is immaterial as to the sense; for if they are *like* to the Angels

Angels in *infinite* existence, they must be equal to them in existence : yet in propriety of terms "*like* unto the Angels" is inadequate to ἰσάγγελοι : for though all equals are similar, all similars are not equal.

Mr. Lindsey conceives that in the appellation of *the Son of God* there was nothing, which the Jews could interpret as implying any pretension to equality with God :—but till Mr. Lindsey produces proper examples of ἰσος in the sense of similitude without equality ; and at the same time can shew, that, when on another occasion, but on the same account, the Jews charged Jesus with making himself *God*, θεος does not mean God ; we must think Mr. Lindsey more influenced by his previous persuasions, than by the natural force of the terms.

VII.

P. 11. *and they all condemned him to be guilty of death.*] That the reader may better judge of the charge for which Jesus Christ was condemned to death, I shall lay before him the several passages in the Gospels, which relate to the charge and condemnation.

Math. xxvi. 63—66. "And the high Priest answered and said unto him ; I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us, whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said ; nevertheless [*more-over, πλην*] I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high Priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy ; what further need have we of witnesses ? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye ? They answered and said, he is guilty of death."

Mark, xiv. 61—64. "Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed ? And Jesus said, I am : and ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, what need we any further witnesses ? Ye have heard the blasphemy : what think ye ? and they all condemned him to be guilty of death."

Luke, xxii. 66—71. "And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people, and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led him into their council, saying, Art thou the Christ ? tell us. And he said unto them, If I tell you, you will not believe. And if I ask you, you will not answer me,

"nor

"nor let me go. Hereafter shall the Son of Man sit on the right hand of the power of God. Then said they all, Art thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them, Ye say that I am. And they said, What need we any further witness, for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth."

John, xix. 6, 7. "When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him; for I find no fault in him. The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God."

Dr. Priestley says in his History of the Christian Church (Vol. I. p. 21.) that at the time of the trial "not knowing, what charge to bring against him, on which they could sentence him to death his judges hastily took up *blasphemy*, accusing him of speaking lightly of the Temple, which they might think was likely to destroy his interest with the common people. But not being able to prove this charge, the high priest, who presided in the Court, solemnly asked him, whether he was the Messiah; and upon his acknowledging it, the majority of them voted his death, on the idea of his having arrogated to himself a high office from God, which did not belong to him."

There is in this passage a misstatement of important circumstances, which does not appear consistent with the conduct of an exact and impartial historian. Jesus Christ was not accused of speaking lightly of the Temple by his Judges, but by suborned witnesses: he was not accused of *blasphemy* for "speaking lightly of the Temple," but for calling himself *the Son of God*: the charge of blasphemy was not taken up "hastily," but after repeated declarations that he was the Son of God, confirmed by his avowal of the same declaration to the high Priest at his trial: and it appeared from the sense in which the Jews understood his previous declarations, that they considered his assuming to himself the title of the Son of God, not merely as pretending to "a high office from God," but as professing to be God, and equal with God.

VIII.

In the view, which I have given of Christ's testimony of himself, I have considered the appellation of *the Son of God* as the charge for which he was condemned to death; and therefore as a sure foundation of our belief in the divinity of

of Christ. Dr. Price, in his excellent sermon on the præexistence and superhumanity of Christ, thinks that the *mere* appellation of the Son of God as applied to Christ decides nothing on the subject; and though he concurs so far with the believers in the divinity of Christ, as to think that *the Socinian doctrine is not consistent with Christianity*; yet he considers himself bound, as a candid enquirer after truth, to lay no stress on this appellation, as an argument for Christ's divinity. Dr. Price relinquished the argument, because he thought it of no weight; on the contrary, it forces itself on my apprehension, when fully examined, as the great fundamental proof of our Lord's divinity: and I am disposed to believe, that Dr. Price would have thought very differently of it, if he had pursued the argument in all its circumstances.

It is not the *mere* appellation of the Son of God as applied to Christ by *others*, on which the stress deserves to be laid, but the appellation, as it was assumed by *himself*, and understood by the *Jews*. They considered his pretension to the title, as blasphemy, and at last condemned him to death for it. But in what did this blasphemy consist? In the more general sense of the words, it could not be considered as blasphemy; for the Jews called themselves sons of God, and God their common Father: it could not be as a prophet; for he was considered by the generality of the Jews, as a great Prophet, and as such he was entitled to the name of the Son of God in an eminent degree. It must therefore have been in a sense, which had never before been applied to Man, and was compatible only with that *great person* so long predicted by their Prophets. That Jesus Christ meant, under the title of the Son of God, to represent himself as the Messiah, the Christ, is admitted by all, who call themselves Christians, as well as by the Jews who condemned him to the Cross. His blasphemy therefore consisted in calling himself the Messiah. But what was the extent of the blasphemy? The Socinians say, that Jesus Christ never professed himself to be more than Man, and that the imputed blasphemy did not imply any pretension to divinity; but merely the assumption of a certain great office and commission from God, which the Jews considered as an imposture: and they allege in favour of this assertion, the common expectations of the Jews, who looked only for a great temporal deliverer.—In answer to this allegation we may reply, that the *expectations* of the *Jews* cannot be made the rule of *our belief*. Predictions are never properly understood, till they are accomplished. Our belief therefore of Jesus Christ is not to be regulated by the *Jews'* expectations of the Messiah, or *their* opinions of Jesus Christ; but by *HIS* professions of *himself*.

Now

Now from these professions, in the many passages, where Christ speaks of God as his Father, in the most marked and appropriate relation, the obvious inference is, that the appellation of the Son of God, assumed by him, implies the same kind of relation to him, as that of a Man to his Father : that is, it implies coessentiality with God, and therefore equality of nature, and consequently divinity in its full extent. Such, I say, appears to be the obvious inference : but, thanks to the Evangelical Historians, we are not left to a mere presumptive inference. For we have the express attestation of his living witnesses the Jews, to what they considered as his meaning : they repeatedly charged him with blasphemy for making himself *equal with God*,—*one with God*,—and *God* : and at last condemned him to death for his blasphemy by virtue of the Levitical law.

The Jews, indeed, as his enemies, might have exaggerated the charge against him. But Christ knew, in what sense they understood the appellation, which he assumed ; and by his acquiescence admitted the truth of their allegations. If they had misunderstood his pretensions, he had many opportunities of undeceiving them, and no doubt would have undeceived them, not, to prevent his death ; (for to that end he knew that he was destined ;) but, (what in his opinion, to consider him only as the best of all just Men must have been of much greater consequence,) to prevent the propagation of an error, which his acquiescence in their charge could not fail to establish. Yet instead of correcting their opinions he confirmed the charge by repeating his assertions, and submitting to the sentence, which the Levitical law passed on him for calling himself the Son of God. Therefore, if we admit in any degree the truth of the Christian Revelation, and believe that Christ “came into the world, that he should bear witness unto the truth,” we must believe him to have been what he professed himself to be, *the Son of God*, in the literal sense of those Terms, which his living witnesses imputed to them, that is, *God*, *equal with God* and *one with God*.

IX.

P. 12. *that if we ask any thing in his name, HE will do it*] Our Saviour’s words are, “If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.” On another occasion he said, “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matth. xviii. 20.) It is on the ground of these assurances, that St. John says in his first Epistle, v. 14, 15. “And this is the

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"confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to HIS will, HE heareth us. And if we know, that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions, that we desired of him." Nothing can shew more clearly and expressly than these passages, that Christ is the proper object of our prayers, and that he was so considered by St. John. They serve too as a collateral proof of our Saviour's declaration of his divinity. For nothing less than God can be the proper object of our adorations ; therefore when Christ assures us that HE will be present to all our supplications, and that HE will perform our petitions, he encourages and directs us to address our prayers to him as well as to the Father ; and therefore declares himself God, as unequivocally as by any appellation the most expressive of divinity.

X.

P. 17. §. 2.] Dr. Priestley tells the inhabitants of Birmingham, that they should not suffer the authority of their clergy to direct their opinions in Religion ; and that nothing is so easy as to understand the most important questions relating to Religion. " You are told that there are many *deep mysteries* in Religion, and therefore that your clergy must teach you what to *think*, or rather what to *say* about them. But be persuaded to think better of yourselves and of your own understandings. These things are not in reality of so difficult a nature as many things in your common trades and businesses. The most important questions relating to religion are the plainest things in the world, and require nothing but a common understanding, honestly applied, to comprehend them." (*Familiar Letters addressed to the Inhabitants of Birmingham*, Part III. p. 22.)—Nothing would be more easy, if they would trust implicitly to Dr. Priestley ; and these *argumenta ad vulgus* wear too flattering and seducing an aspect not to have some weight with them. But if they study their Bible, they will read of *the deep things of God*, and *the great mystery of godliness* ; and if they attentively consider our Saviour's conversation with Nathaniel, they will find that however simple and easy of acceptation divine truths are, as objects of *belief*, yet when opposed by prejudice or self-conceit, they present many difficulties not only to the unlearned but the learned. Indeed if they read their Bible for themselves, and then see how much Dr. Priestley and other Socinians differ from all other denominations of dissenters, as well as from the national Church, they will

will find sufficient reason to distrust their own judgements, and, perhaps, to think that they will gain nothing by changing their confidence in their old Teachers. The learning, the ardour, the indignation which have been opposed, from so many quarters to Dr. Priestley's attempts to undermine that great article of our Religion, the divinity of Christ, would shew them, (if they had leisure to attend to the many valuable tracts, which the Controversy has produced,) how little reliance is due to Dr. Priestley's confident assertions, and pertinacious challenges to his opponents: and the great opposition of sentiment between the learned parties in dispute would probably teach his unlearned readers more humility of mind than is expedient for Dr. Priestley's views of reformation.

Dr. Price says that the doctrines of Dr. Priestley respecting the person of Christ render the Scriptures unintelligible, and Christianity itself incredible: and that his doctrines cannot be supported without torturing the Scriptures, or renouncing their authority. Dr. Priestley says that Dr. Price's doctrines are so improbable, as greatly to impede the progress of Christianity.—Mr. Hawkins is astonished, that an ingenuous and enlightened mind should be influenced by such baneful prepossession, as marks Dr. Priestley's groundless and partial objections to the doctrines of the national Church. Dr. Priestley is as much astonished, that any person with a mind so enlightened as Mr. Hawkins's should not perceive the futility of his reasoning in favour of the Church doctrines, and how much he has exposed the cause, which he undertook to defend.—The Bishop of St. David's ascribes Dr. Priestley's rejection of the doctrine of Christ's divinity on the authority of the Fathers to his ignorance of the learned languages, his deficiency in the knowledge of Christian Antiquity, and his general incompetency to the inquiry. Dr. Priestley retorts the charge of deficiency and incompetency on his antagonist: and, though a party in the dispute, without waiting for the decision of the public, pronounces, "that there is hardly an example in the whole history of Controversy, of any man having made so poor a figure as his antagonist has done in this."

When Men of such acknowledged abilities differ so widely in their opinions, how shall the unlearned Christian decide? How shall he be able, after making all the allowable deductions of prejudice, self-interest, &c. to compute the probabilities of right judgement.—There is indeed one rule, which may be of service to him, and is not undeserving the attention of Dr. Priestley,—that when all denominations of Christians, (except Socinians) however partial to their peculiar

tenets, concur with Dr. Price in considering Dr. Priestley's opinions concerning Jesus Christ to be inconsistent with Christianity, there is every probability, that *they* are right in their judgement of his opinions, and that *Dr. Priestley* and his Socinian followers are wrong.

XI.

P. 23. *to controvert even the authority of Scripture, when it does not accord with their own judgement*] "So strange and incredible does your Hypothesis, [the præ-existence of Christ] appear to me, that rather than admit it, I would suppose the whole verse [*what and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where he was before*] to be an interpolation, or that the old Apostle dictated one thing, and his amanuensis wrote another." Dr. Priestley's Letters to Dr. Price, p. 58. in his *Defences of Unitarianism for the year 1787*.—"As it is not pretended, that there are any miracles adapted to prove that Christ made and supports the world, I do not see, that we are under any obligation to believe it *merely because it was an opinion held by an Apostle*." Dr. Priestley's "History of Early Opinions concerning Christ," Vol. I. p. 63.—And yet Dr. Priestley (in his Letters to Mr. Burn, p. 2. 5.) says that the charge, which has been brought against him of *undervaluing, and rejecting the authority of the Scriptures* is "contrary to fact and all appearance of fact," and calls it "a gross and unfounded calumny."

XII.

P. 26. *without having any settled opinions of our own*] "I shall not be offended, (says Dr. Priestley in his Letters to Dr. Price) if you account for my *roving from one opinion to another* by supposing that I have a temper of mind too *hostile to every thing that is established*; or if you should say that I am more apt to be satisfied with any thing belonging to myself than with my opinions, and that I *am not likely to fix long in any scheme*. Certain it is that so far from having much fondness for the opinions that I received from my education, I have gone on changing, though always in *one direction*, from the time that I began to think for myself to the present day, and *I will not pretend to say, when my creed will be fixed*."—How an inquiring mind may be led to embrace the doctrine of Christ's divinity, in direct opposition to the progress of Dr. Priestley's mind, the reader may see very strikingly shewn, in Dr. Horsley's *Tracts*, p. 280 &c.

XIII.

XIII.

P. 28. *The most defective representations of Church History*] I say the most defective, because defective in essential circumstances, and partial, because consistent with the opinions of one part only, and that much the smallest part of those, who profess themselves to be Christians. It might have been expected from an Historian of the Christian Church, that in his account of the origin of the Christian Religion, he would not have omitted *any very* distinguishing particulars relating to the personal character and authority of its founder. But Dr. Priestley has omitted the *most* distinguishing particulars in the life and conversation of Jesus Christ: he says nothing of the extraordinary circumstances of his birth, nothing of his many discourses with the Jews and his disciples respecting himself and his commission; and has misrepresented the nature of the charge, on which, he was condemned to the Cross. The miraculous conception shews that Jesus Christ had no human father; yet Dr. Priestley calls him the Son of Joseph, and says nothing of his birth. — To encourage and direct his disciples to offer their prayers to him as well as to the Father, by assuring them that HE would be always present to their supplications, and would perform their petitions, is to assume to himself the power and authority of God, and yet Dr. Priestley says nothing of a circumstance so declarative of Christ's personal Character. — To forgive sins in his own name belongs to God only: but Jesus Christ forgave sins in his own name, and the Jews charged him with blasphemy for so doing; yet Dr. Priestley is silent about this extraordinary exertion of authority. These are circumstances which tend essentially to develop the character, pretensions, and authority of Christ, and to lead us to a true knowledge of him; and therefore ought not to have been omitted by an accurate and impartial Historian, how much soever in his private sentiments, he might differ from the general belief of Christians.

XIV.

P. 28. *sedition appeals to the passions of the people*] Whatever writings have a tendency to create disaffection to the subsisting government of any country, may be justly deemed seditious, though their intended effects may be defeated both by the weakness of their arguments, and the temper of the times. The Ecclesiastical

fiastical government of this Country is an essential part of the great national System established at the Revolution : Yet Dr. Priestley has always avowed his enmity to our Ecclesiastical establishment, and his most strenuous endeavours for its demolition. But though the asperity of his censures, the ardour of his wishes, and the confidence of his predictions, be levelled chiefly against the *Church* of England, yet he acknowledges, that he would willingly see the *whole* established government of his Country subverted for the sake of removing the "Corruptions of Christianity," which it supports. "It is nothing but the *alliance* of the kingdom of Christ with the kingdoms of this world (an alliance which our Lord himself expressly disclaimed) that supports the grossest corruptions of Christianity ; and perhaps we must wait for the fall of the civil powers, before this most unnatural alliance can be broken. Calamitous, no doubt, will that time be. But what convulsion in the political world ought to be a subject of lamentation, if it be attended with so desirable an event. May the *kingdom of God* and of Christ (that which I conceive to be intended in the Lord's prayer) truly and fully come, though all the kingdoms of the world be removed in order to make way for it." (*History of the Corruptions of Christianity*, in the Conclusion.) To this passage the reader may add other passages equally pointed against the whole national establishment. See Dr. Horsley's TRACTS, *Remarks*, P. II. Ch. VI. on the *general Spirit of Dr. Priestley's Controversial writings*. Such violent declarations as are contained in the passages of Dr. Priestley quoted and alluded to, favour too much of that intemperate resentment, which our Saviour condemned in his disciples, who would have called down fire from heaven on the Samaritans for not receiving him into their village. "But he turned and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy Men's lives, but to save them."

If however the *extinction* of those religious doctrines, such as the Divinity of Christ, which Dr. Priestley considers as Corruptions of Christianity, are worth so great a sacrifice, as the subversion of the present establishment and the downfall of the powers that be :—it will follow, on the contrary supposition, that, if the doctrines in question are the doctrines of truth revealed from God, which we of the Church of England believe them to be ; and if all men of every rank and condition have an equal interest in the truth ; the *possession* of these truths deserves, *at the least*, (for such *protection* falls infinitely short of Dr. Priestley's means

means of *extinction*,) to be protected from violation and corruption by the most effectual provisions, which the civil authority of a free Christian country can afford.

XV.

P. 29. *without the influence of worldly motives, without hypocrisy, or insanity.*] "The Adversaries of Luther might have said to him, we must have a creed, "and this creed may contain errors. But it is better that it should be so, than "that we should have no creed at all; and as to those, who cannot subscribe to "it, let them leave the Church, and the emoluments of it to those, who can." "But who then, Gentlemen, would be left in it? Not the inquisitive, or the "conscientious, but as many of the unthinking, the dishonest, and unbelievers, "as could get into it." Dr. Priestley's *Letters to the Candidates for orders in the two Universities*, p. 123. in his *Defences of Unitarianism* for 1787. — "I now "see that there is something in the Church of England, which has more power "than I was aware of, to blind the eyes of Men, in other respects honest and "ingenuous; and to produce a degree of *self-delusion* almost equal to any thing, "that we see in *Bedlam*. This makes me thankful to God, that my situation "and circumstances have been different from yours. For I am far from think- "ing that either my *understanding*, or my *heart* is naturally better than yours. "But what must we think of a *system*, which has such power of perverting the "best faculties and dispositions that God has given to man! Let all those, who "are happily out of the influence of its fascination join in the most ardent pray- "ers, and the most earnest, but peaceable endeavours, for the *demolition* of it." Dr. Priestley's *Letters to Mr. Hawkins*, in his *Defences of Unitarianism* for the years 1788 and 1789.

XVI.

P. 29. *interests, which by many analogies appear to be intimately connected with the prosperity of the whole national establishment*] The arguments advanced by the Dissenters for the Repeal of the *Corporation and Test Acts* (those bulwarks as Blackstone calls them, of our civil and religious liberties,) proceed on principles inconsistent with the great system of national government established at the Revolution, because on principles strictly democratical, and on *natural* claims superseded by the rights of *civil* polity.

F I N I S.

Shortly will be Published,

REMARKS

ON THE

SCRIPTURAL ACCOUNT

OF THE

DIMENSIONS OF SOLOMON'S TEMPLE;

Occasioned by the Supplement annexed to the Second Edition of a Pamphlet, entitled, "Evidence that the Relation of Josephus concerning Herod's having new built the Temple at Jerusalem, is either false or misinterpreted."

XVI.

L I N E S

